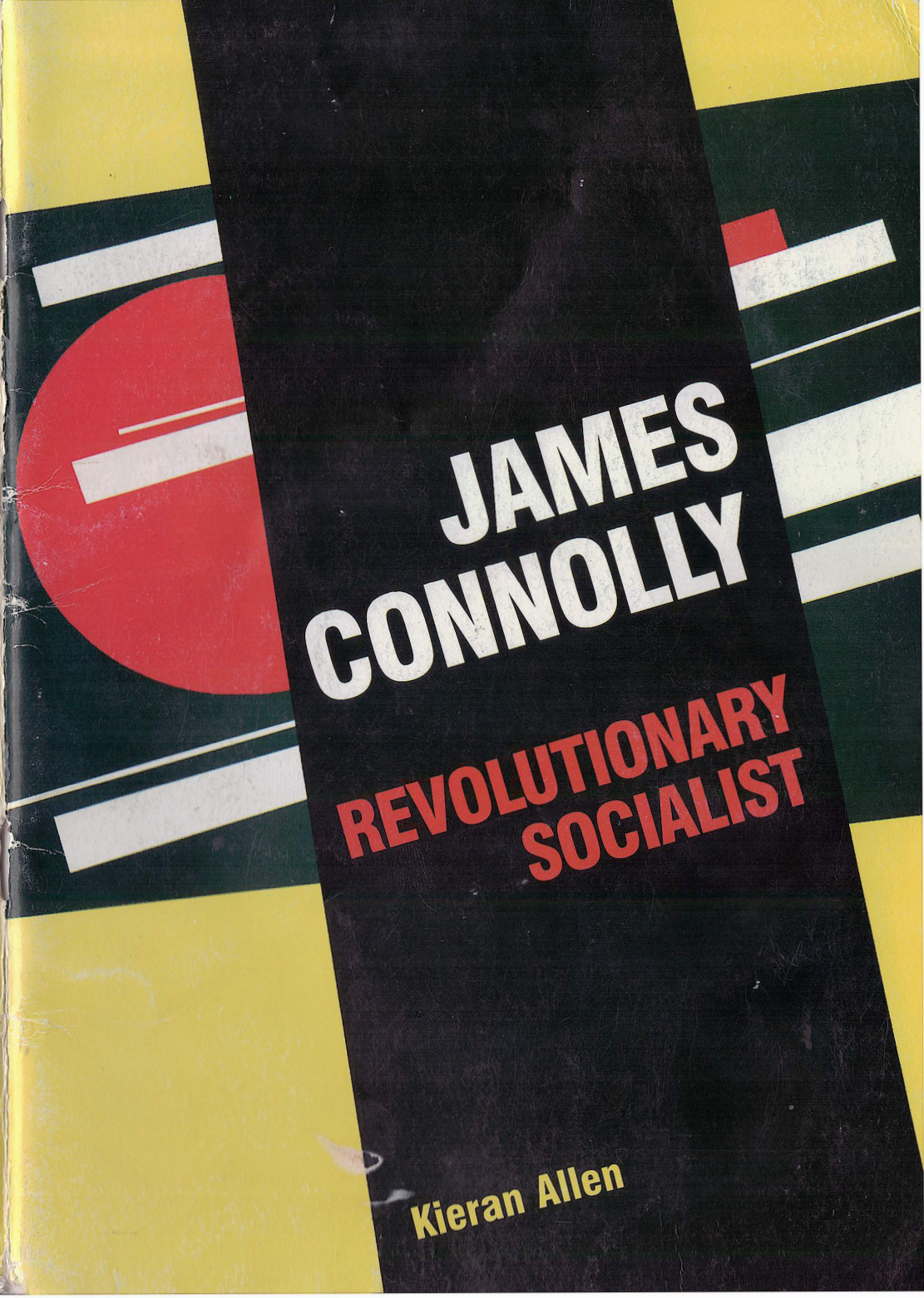




JAMES CONNOLLY

**REVOLUTIONARY
SOCIALIST**

Kieran Allen

**James Connolly:
Socialist Revolutionary**
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Author's note

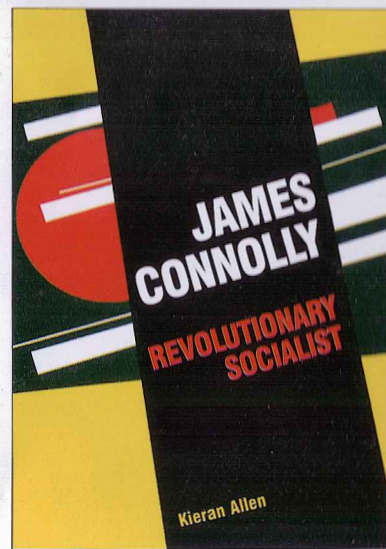
Most of the material for this pamphlet is based on the book I wrote in 1990, *The Politics of James Connolly*, which is now out of print.

This was a theoretical study of his ideas and engaged in a critical debate with them. Most of the arguments I still stand over but the tone and enthusiasm for polemic reflected the dark period of the 1980s.

Today far more opportunities have opened up for socialists - and with that more questions. Principally how do comparatively small numbers of revolutionaries connect with vast numbers who believe that capitalism has become 'extreme' and out of control. In revisiting some of the material I was surprised at just how contemporary Connolly's writing is for those who are striving for 21st century socialism.

Above all else Connolly was, as the pamphlet I hope demonstrates, a revolutionary socialist. That singular fact is source of a deep embarrassment for the political elite of the Celtic Tiger. Long may it remain so.

Kieran Allen April 2001



Chapter 1: The Finest of Revolutionaries

Official Ireland has long held a dark secret: One of the founders of the state born in the rebellion in 1916 was a Marxist and socialist revolutionary.

James Connolly was, of course, canonised as a nationalist hero. Train stations, schools, hospitals and the *cumann* of Fianna Fail have all been called after him. Eamon De Valera, who along with the right wing Bishop John Charles McQuaid, shaped the political culture of Ireland for decades, was once asked which historical figure best represented his views. He replied without hesitation that he 'would stand side by side with James Connolly'.¹

The sanitised version of Connolly appeared soon after his execution. The War of Independence had unleashed an extreme radicalism and some were worried. One Sinn Féin commentator, A de Blacam, noted that Catholic communities are

Generally hostile to socialism and so the socialistic enthusiasm which ran over Ireland during 1919 puzzled many. But there the fact was. Never was Ireland more devoutly Catholic than today... yet nowhere was the Bolshevik revolution more sympathetically saluted.²

So a sanitisation process was needed.

It began with the Catholic Truth Society who produced a pamphlet on the *The Social Teaching of James Connolly* which indicated that while he may have used Marxist words, he genuinely held orthodox Catholic and nationalist values.³ In a similar vein, Countess Markievicz, who made a transition from a radical leader of the Irish Citizen's Army to a Fianna Fail supporter, acknowledged that 'Socialism was indeed what he stood for but it was the socialism of James Connolly and nobody else'.⁴ Connolly came to be viewed as the leader of the Rising who had some 'social concerns' - almost as if he were a sincere member of the Vincent de Paul. It lasted a long time. When another great wave of radicalism swept the world in 1968, one of Ireland's prominent historians, Owen Dudley Edwards, could still write that Connolly 'was one of the best and most enlightened apologists the Catholic Church has seen since the industrial revolution'.⁵

Connolly's own union, the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, treated him little better. Soon after his death, its leadership fell into the hands of William O'Brien, who was compared by Sean O'Casey to a 'most respectable clerk at home in a sure job'.⁶ O'Brien aligned the union with the Irish political establishment and launched vitriolic attacks on Connolly's former comrade in arms, James Larkin. Yet he still wanted to cloak himself in the former's legacy, provided it was well and truly cleansed. So the ITGWU constantly used the phrase 'Co-operative Commonwealth' in place the more militant sounding 'Workers Republic'. When the union helped to publish a collection of his writings in the early 1950s, it simply left out some of the more radical and embarrassing pieces.

Even on the small communist left, Connolly was something of an enigma. In the 1960s, a Connolly Association was formed among Irish workers who had been forced to emigrate to Britain. Freed from the anti-communist hysteria at home, many made their first contact with socialist policies. At its core, however, the organisation held to 'stages theory', which was

then fashionable among the supporters of the Communist Party. This held that when a country was colonised, it had to first fight for national independence and only start the fight for socialism after that stage was completed.

Desmond Greaves, who was the first major biographer of Connolly, came from this background. While his book did much to rescue the views of Connolly from suffocating conformity imposed by the Church-State alliance, he was nevertheless nervous about Connolly's radicalism on the fight against empire. As we shall see, Connolly held no such stages view of the fight for socialism and to use a modern parlance, was 'full on'. Greaves, however, expressed his concern that Connolly 'tended to deny any progressive significance to the capitalist class'.⁷

A disturber of the political peace?

What, then, was the nature of this intense radicalism that burned at the heart of James Connolly? It flowed really from two sources – raw working class anger and the position he took up on the left of the international Marxist movement.

James Connolly was born to impoverished Irish immigrants in the Cowgate ghetto of Edinburgh. His father was an itinerant seasonal labourer who had come by more secure work as a manure carter for Edinburgh Corporation. His mother had worked as a domestic servant. A later claim, designed to give Connolly more authentic Irish-Ireland origins, that he was born 'in a gloomy cabin in Ballybay', is simply false.⁸ Through his life, Connolly spoke with a British accent. Worse, from the point of view of nationalists, he served in the British army. Just as today, poverty has also been the great recruiter for armies and it appears that at the age of fourteen Connolly enlisted under a false name in the Royal Scots regiment.⁹

Connolly joined the socialist movement in Edinburgh in 1889 and from the start displayed an utmost determination to rid society of capitalism. Edinburgh was in the grip of a working class upsurge associated with 'new unionism'. This refers to a pattern throughout Britain whereby tens of thousands of unskilled workers joined large, general militant unions. Connolly's brother John was one of the main organisers of a march in the town for the eight hour day – and was sacked from his job in the town council as a result. Subsequently, James replaced him as secretary of the local Scottish Socialist Federation.

Soon he was working as virtually a full time organiser for the socialist movement, breathing and living a fiery passion that was his trademark to the end of his life. His spirit was summed up by the motto put on the masthead of a local paper he produced: *The Great appear Great to us because we are on our knees: Let us rise.*

In working class circles at the time, there was much discussion on the formation of a Labour Party and later Keir Hardie, a union official with the miners, would take more concrete steps to bring it about. At the time Connolly took a very different view:

It's not a Labour party the workers need. It's a revolutionary party pledged to overthrow the capitalist class in the only way it can be done by putting up barricades and taking over the factories by force. There is no other way.¹⁰

Later, he took a different view on the formation of a Labour Party and indeed proposed the creation of an Irish Labour Party. But these sentiments cannot be dismissed as youthful

enthusiasm because he stuck with the goal of revolution throughout his life – even if for tactical purposes and at particular points he advocated a broader Labour alliance.

The Marxist movement, which Connolly gravitated to, had two main currents in Britain at the time. One was the Social Democratic Federation, which had been formed by H. M. Hyndman, an eccentric London business man who read a French translation of Marx's Capital while on an Atlantic steamer. The SDF was a 'propagandist' organisation stressing educational classes for members to equip them with arguments to explain the evils of capitalism. Unfortunately, it never left behind a certain imperialist jingoism it inherited from Hyndman. The other was the more left wing Socialist League which included among its leaders, the painter William Morris and Eleanor Marx (Marx's daughter). This advocated physical revolution, taking up the old Chartist battle cry 'Peacefully if we may – forcefully if we must'.

Although Connolly's early trajectory in Scotland is a little complicated, he soon gravitated to the more left wing Marxist current. This was evident when he stood as a socialist candidate in 1894. His approach to elections would horrify many of his apparent admirers of today.

The return of a socialist candidate does not mean the immediate realisation of even the programme of palliatives commonly set before the electors. Nay such programmes are in themselves of little weight, indeed apart from the spirit they are interpreted. The election of a Socialist to any public body is only valuable in so far as it is the return of a disturber of the political peace.¹¹

Dublin

In 1896, James Connolly arrived in Dublin after he had been driven out of Edinburgh through sheer poverty. He had responded to an advertisement for a socialist organiser placed by the Dublin Socialist Club. He immediately disbanded the club and formed Ireland's first Marxist organisation, the Irish Socialist Republican Party. Its first meeting was held in the backroom of a public house with eight paid up members. A rather salutary point for those who condemn 'micro-groups' too easily!

The Dublin socialists were influenced by the Fabian creed – a belief that the system could only be reformed by slow gradual change from above. One of its most famous exponents was the playwright, George Bernard Shaw. Connolly, however, was not impressed and set about shifting the outlook of the members of his new party. He gave a lecture under the title 'Why we are revolutionists' and denounced Fabianism for trying to

Emasculate the working class, by denying the philosophy of class struggle, weakening the belief of the workers in the political self-sufficiency of their own class, and by substituting the principle of municipal capitalism and bureaucratic State control for the principle of revolutionary reconstruction involved in [Socialism].¹²

The Fabian argument which claimed that revolution is 'unrealistic' and promoted 'practical' reform from above is still influential in conventional parties like Labour and Sinn Féin today. Its logic leads to a desire to get into government so that the practical reforms can be brought about. When the left is in minority electorally, it suggests that entry into a coalition government with a right wing party may be considered a tactic. In 1899, James Connolly faced the first example of a socialist entering such a government when Alexandre Millerand

became Minister of Commerce. Connolly denounced it in the most vigorous terms, claiming that 'the capitalist governments of the world are now adopting and improving upon the policy of corrupting or "nobbling" the leaders which has enabled the English governing class to disorganise every serious attack upon their privileged position'. Even when Karl Kautsky attacked Millerand for making a 'tactical' mistake, Connolly kept up the offensive. It was not tactical mistake, it was a total sell-out!¹³

The name that Connolly bestowed on his new party, the Irish Socialist Republican Party, implied an important departure. Prior to his arrival, the tiny handful of socialists took no position on the national question. Those from a Catholic background tended to be Fenian and those from Protestant background tended to be Unionist. It was almost as if it were a matter of personal attitude and preference. In addition, the advocacy of a Republic and the removal of a British monarch were seen very much as the preserve of the 'secret societies'.

Connolly, however, broke from this on both counts. Socialists, firstly, had to take a stance against the empire and for Irish independence for the most elementary of reasons. First, 'Socialists were opposed to all oppression so should they ever be foremost in the daily battle against all its manifestations, social and political'.¹⁴ As Ireland was an oppressed nation and had a democratic right to its freedom, socialists had to support its right to independence, no matter what background they came from. Secondly, the advocacy of a republic and revolution should not be left to secret conspiratorial groups. He mocked those who only talked revolution when their heads were closely together and their eyes fearfully glancing around. Writing afterwards, he noted that

The socialists broke from this ridiculous secrecy, and in hundreds of speeches in the most public places of the metropolis, as well as in scores of thousands of pieces of literature scattered around the country, announced their purpose to muster all the forces of labour for the revolutionary re-construction of society and the incidental destruction of the British Empire!¹⁵

Note the order in the last sentence. Destroying the empire was undertaken on the way to socialism!

This was a brilliant step and important for all socialists who came since. Individuals may be motivated by a desire to end privilege but to launch an effective fight you have to position yourself within the society you operate. Abstract denunciations of capitalism whether issued in Baghdad or Boston are of limited value. The system operates through concrete forms of oppression - seeking to co-opt some and create division among its many opponents. Socialists have to take clear, concrete stances in those political battles against oppression - they have to know what side they are on.

But what type of republic did Connolly advocate? He worked with many of the advanced nationalists of the day but he had little time for misty eyed sentimentality. He appreciated and defended the use of the Irish language for example but objected to any romantic attempt to ignore the real material conditions of workers. As long as poverty debased the cultural level of the majority 'the most priceless manuscript of ancient Celtic lore would hold but second place in their esteem to a rasher of bacon'.¹⁶ So the republic he wanted could not just come wrapped in the green flag.

If you remove the English army to-morrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs. England would still rule you to your ruin, even while your lips offered hypocritical homage at the shrine of that Freedom whose cause you had betrayed. Nationalism without Socialism - without a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of that common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin - is only national recreancy.

Breaking from sectarianism

Every revolutionary such as Connolly faces two great dilemmas. How to they avoid either diluting their 'extreme' views to adapt to the prevailing view of society or becoming ever stancher but more marginal. The dilemma arises because although the system is based on privileges and inequality, it wins some acceptance from the majority because of the power of ideology. By ideology, we mean a set of ideas which are connected to the legitimization of dominant interest groups. What often passes for 'common sense' such as claims that 'we are all naturally greedy' and that 'competition is good for efficiency' are in fact elements of that ideology. They present the bourgeois view of the world as if it were entirely natural.

By the time he left Ireland in 1904, Connolly was totally committed to the revolutionary approach as his views on parliamentary democracy indicate:

The democracy of Parliament is in short the democracy of Capitalism. Capitalism gives to the worker the right to choose his master, but insists that the fact of mastership shall remain unquestioned; Parliamentary Democracy gives to the worker the right to a voice in the selection of his rulers but insists that he shall bend as a subject to be ruled. The fundamental feature of both in their relation to the worker is that they imply his continued subjection to a ruling class once his choice of the personnel of the rulers is made. But the freedom of the revolutionist will change the choice of rulers which we have to-day into the choice of administrators of laws voted upon directly by the people; and will also substitute for the choice of masters (capitalists) the appointment of reliable public servants under direct public control. That will mean true democracy - the industrial democracy of the Socialist Republic.¹⁷

His records of fighting all forms of oppression was second to none. This was demonstrated when Jewish workers in Dublin issued a leaflet in Yiddish calling for a vote for him. The leaflet noted that 'The Socialists are the only ones who stand always and everywhere against every national oppression. It is the Socialists who went out into the streets of Paris against the wild band of anti-semites at the time of the Dreyfus case'.¹⁸

But how could Connolly maintain these revolutionary positions, avoid sectarianism and still connect with tens of thousands of workers. America was to raise this question in sharp way.

When Connolly went to America, he believed that he was connecting up with the best revolutionary socialist organisation in the world. The Socialist Labour Party was led by Daniel DeLeon. DeLeon, originally a Colombia University lecturer in law, had stood out against compromises in the international socialist movement. He took on the conservative leaders of

the American Federation of Labour, a grouping of mainly craft unions, denouncing them as 'labor fakirs' who did 'picket duty for capitalism'¹⁹ But DeLeon operated in an era where there was very little discussion about how a revolutionary minority can connect with the majority of their fellow workers. Instead of looking at what strategy and tactics might work to open a wider space for revolutionary ideas, the practice of the SLP was one of propaganda and denunciation. A minority of activists were educated to a high level on what was wrong with capitalism and they then denounced the reformist leaders who collaborated with the system. There was no truck with fighting for reforms as part of a revolutionary strategy and instead all concessions from capitalism were treated as 'banana peelings under the feet of the proletariat.'²⁰ It is a simple step from here to dogmatism. Instead of Marxism being used as a method of analysis to assist the liberation of workers it became a catechism against which everyone is measured.

Soon after arriving, Connolly got a sense there was something wrong with the SLP's sectarian approach. In their opposition to the union leaders, the party had swung to a position known as the 'iron law of wages' - a view point originally advocated by the German socialist Lassalle in his debates with Marx. This argued that every rise in wages was futile because it would be automatically offset by a rise in prices. In practice, it was a dogmatic assertion which undermined any revolutionary work within the unions. Connolly's enthusiasm for workers' struggle brought him back to Marx's original standpoint.

The theory that a rise in prices always destroys the value of a rise in wages sounds very revolutionary, of course, but it is not true. If it were, it knocks the feet from under the Socialist Trade and Labour Alliance.²¹

He also challenged the prevailing idea in the SLP that socialists were opposed to monogamous marriage. Unfortunately, his reaction to the SLP dogmatism here was highly defensive, claiming for example that the chief supporters of divorce were the capitalists!²²

On the question of religion, however, he made more substantive points. The SLP had reprinted an article by the Belgian socialist Vanderville which made the very 'radical' argument that the most important remaining struggle was between the Black International and the Red International. Vanderville was on the right wing of the international socialist movement, supporting for example the entry of Millerand into government. But his position as 'free thinker' opposed to religion was deemed more important.

Connolly took up this fake radicalism because it pandered to an implicit racism in US society. At the time Catholics made up a large proportion of recent immigrants and were often attacked on a religious basis. This reaction, unfortunately, found an echo in some socialist circles when the supposed intellectual superiority of a 'free thinking' position was counterpoised to 'backward' Catholics. A comparison might be made between the left winger today who devotes considerable passion to berating the 'backwardness' and 'fanaticism' of Muslims even as such believers have become the principal targets for racist abuse by imperialism.

Connolly's reaction on the religious question was, however, again somewhat defensive. He claimed, for example, that the Catholic Church as an institution was not a barrier to socialism. Nevertheless, the thrust of his argument was to challenge a dogmatic sectarianism which hides reactionary prejudices about oppressed groups. Atheism should not be part of

the programme of a socialist group. Although he took a rather different view to Connolly on religion, the Russian revolutionary Lenin made a similar point when he noted that 'unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven'.²³

Only the workers can free themselves

Connolly eventually broke from the sectarianism of the SLP to pursue revolution by a different route. The route initially chosen was the Industrial Workers of the World or the Wobblies.

The Wobblies, who are still celebrated to this day in the Ballad of Joe Hill, were a wonderful organisation. It originally grew out of a titanic struggle of miners on the Colorado goldfields and was inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1905 which re-established the importance of the mass strike. It broke from the conservative craft leadership of the AFL-CIO and proclaimed revolution as its goal. Whereas the AFL demanded immigration controls against the 'yellow peril', the Wobblies boldly told American workers that if they 'were but half as class conscious as the average Japanese workers, there would be better conditions than the wretched one they are now forced to submit to'.²⁴ They produced leaflets in Japanese and Chinese and promoted women organisers like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, repeatedly arguing that women 'cannot be driven back into the home... they are part of the army of labour'.²⁵ Above all they fought a class war with such a determination that America's rulers have sought to hide their memory ever since.

Connolly learnt two things from the IWW - revolutionary unionism and a renewed confidence that socialism equalled self liberation for workers. Alongside Larkin, he brought those traditions to the early Irish Transport and General Workers Union when he took up a post as its organiser on his return to Ireland in 1911. Even some of the specific tactics of the ITGWU were borrowed directly from the Wobblies. During a strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, for example, the Wobblies took the unusual step of removing strikers' children from hunger and misery and sending them to socialist houses in New York. Connolly and Larkin tried the same in 1913 - with less successful results.

His experience with the Wobblies led Connolly into a full embrace of syndicalism - the belief that way to end capitalism was to build the industrial organisation of workers and to eventually call a general strike or a 'lock-out of the capitalist class'. As a strategy there are many weaknesses in this view because it plays down political questions and compares two incomparable phenomena - the experience of capitalists under feudalism and workers under capitalism. Under feudalism, the emerging capitalist class slowly accumulated their economic power within the system and then in events like the French Revolution, shattered the outward framework of the system. But because workers are an exploited class and cannot accumulate the equivalent of capital, they cannot build this economic strength up in a mechanical way. These important issues would affect Connolly's subsequent political evolution but first let's pay tribute to the positive elements of this tradition.

It led him out of a sectish form of politics which was revolutionary in words but passive in practice. Instead Connolly came to appreciate the importance of working in an alliance with other socialists in a 'broader church'. This did not fully solve the problem of revolutionary

strategy, as Connolly later found to his cost. But he had started to grapple with key questions that socialists still face today.

More crucially, his mature version of revolutionary socialism re-inforced his total support for Marx's dictum that 'The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class'. Unlike so many others who came after him, Connolly never equated socialism with state ownership or national development. His vision was summed up in this early definition he gave of socialism

Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operate control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this co-operative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism – it is only state capitalism.

To the cry of the middle class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government,' we reply 'yes, in proportion as the worker are ready to make the government their property'.²⁶

Chapter 2: Fighting the Empire

Empire is back with a vengeance. Once upon a time the American elite never dared mention it but not any more. The influential Wall St Journal columnist, Max Boot, recently wrote an article under the title of *The Case for the American Empire* which bluntly noted that

It is striking – and no co-incidence – that America now faces the prospect of military action in many of the same lands where generations of British colonial subjects went on campaigns. These are all places where Western armies had to quell disorder. Afghanistan and other troubled foreign lands cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided once by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets.²⁷

These are by no means the views of a marginal eccentric. The Project for a New American Century is so influential with the Bush regime that its doctrines have become official policy. Its key manifesto, *Re-Building America's Defences*, notes that at present the US faces no global rival and then suggests that 'America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far as possible into the future.'²⁸ The justification advanced by writers like Robert Kagan is that America exercises a 'benevolent hegemony.'²⁹

All empires, of course, claim to be benign. They say they want to bring civilisation, education, democracy to childlike peoples who cannot do it themselves. When the Britain's rulers colonised India, they did not assert a right to plunder – but rather to civilise a people who burnt widows on funeral pyres. When they brought famine to Ireland, they said that it was simply free market forces that the Irish had not yet learnt to work.

James Connolly spent much of his life attacking these pretensions of empire. He returned to an earlier tradition of Marx and Engels who championed Irish independence, seeing it as a vital condition for both challenging anti-Irish racism in Britain and for undermining the power of its landed aristocracy. Their primary audience, however, were British workers and while they co-operated with Fenian leaders, such as James Stephens, their focus was on how that Irish independence was important for the political development of British working class.

Connolly was the first prolific socialist writer from one of the colonies and therefore his central concern was how the fight for independence linked up with the struggle against capitalism in Ireland. Indeed he saw that link as intrinsic to everything he did. The membership card of the ISRP was crystal clear on its attitude to empire

The subjection of one nation to another as of Ireland to the authority of the British crown is a barrier to the free political development of the subjected nation and can only serve the exploiting classes of both nations. .. Therefore, the national and economic freedom of the Irish people must be sought in the same direction, viz, the establishment of an Irish socialist republic.³⁰

In addition to the democratic argument against empire, Connolly advanced two other specific reasons for why socialists should oppose imperialism.

The first was that the colonisation altered Irish social relations by imposing private property in land and landlordism. Returning to the Fintan Lalor, the radical Young Ireland leader, he argued that there was a social basis to the Irish national question. Lalor had disagreed with

his fellow leaders of the 1848 revolution who wanted to coax landlords into the national movement and instead looked to the peasantry. The Young Irelanders, in his view, should have proclaimed that 'the entire soil of a country belongs to the entire people of that country and is the rightful property not of any one class but of the nation at large'.³¹

Fifty years later, Connolly developed these arguments and reworked them in Marxist terms. Primitive communism, he claimed, survived for far longer in Ireland than elsewhere and in a more developed form. The Brehon system of law meant that land was held in common. The tribal chief did not own the land but was 'the freely elected chief of a free community'.³² Feudalism and capitalism, therefore, came with the English, which destroyed the clan system of common ownership. Whereas the principle behind Gaelic civilisation was 'socialistic', that of English civilisation was 'individualistic'. Undoing the conquest was not just a matter of changing the seat of parliament but of fully uprooting the social system that British colonialism had introduced.

Secondly, adopting a standard Marxist view, Connolly argued that colonialism hindered the economic development of poorer countries and thus stunted the growth of its working class. It also artificially prolonged the life of capitalism in the metropolitan countries by giving them extra markets. On both these grounds, socialists should resist the empire.

Scientific revolutionary Socialism teaches us that Socialism can only be realised when Capitalism has reached its zenith of development; that consequently the advance of nations industrially undeveloped into the capitalistic stage of industry is a thing highly to be desired, since such advance will breed a revolutionary proletariat in such countries and force forward here the political freedom necessary for the speedy success of the Socialist movement; and finally, that as colonial expansion and the conquest of new markets are necessary for the prolongation of the life of capitalism, the prevention of colonial expansion and the loss of markets to countries capitalistically developed, such as England, precipitates economic crises there, and so gives an impulse to revolutionary thought and helps to shorten the period required to develop backward countries and thus prepare the economic conditions needed for our triumph.

Some of these arguments were a little stilted and mechanical but Connolly was advancing specifically socialist reasons to oppose the empire rather than just engaging in patriotic fervour. His mission was the destruction of capitalism - and the empire on the way. The core of his argument - that 19th century imperialism changed the form of land ownership and imposed landlordism artificially on society - is absolutely correct. It explains why, later in the 20th century, peasant movement were at the centre of the major fights against empire in Ireland, India, Kenya, Vietnam and elsewhere. Opposing imperialism, therefore, is not just a matter of changing flags - it also unleashes a social dynamic which, under a certain political leadership, can come up against the system itself. Subsequent evidence, however, has shown that Connolly exaggerated the 'socialistic' basis of Irish civilisation and the communal nature of land ownership. Gaelic civilisation had, in fact, become quite hierarchical long before the invasion.

A union of classes

Fighting empire brought Connolly into contacts with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the 2,000 strong secret society which traced its roots back to the Fenian movement. He directed

many of the arguments in his paper, *The Workers Republic* towards them and wrote for some of their papers.

His hard-headed realism left him with little sympathy for the cult of martyrdom and dead heroes. The national movement, he argued, had to move beyond 'a morbid idealising of the past' and present a political and economic programme to the people of the day. Irish republicanism should no longer base itself on 'the politics of despair' but on 'a science of revolution'.³³ Republicans should form an open political party and seek to win elections. That way they could challenge the Home Rule party which was continually compromising with imperialism and 'drive them from political life'.³⁴ Perceptively, Connolly also argued that if they only sought a purely political republic, they would be divided by sham concessions.

A party aiming at a merely political Republic and proceeding along such lines would always be menaced by the danger that some astute English statesman might, by enacting a sham measure of Home Rule, disorganise the Republican forces by an appearance of concession, until the critical moment passed.³⁵

This, it should be remembered, was written before that astute English statesman, Lloyd George, managed to do precisely this with the Treaty.

Many of these points have been taken up by modern day republicans like Gerry Adams. Although the present day Sinn Féin grew out of an armed struggle that disdained political involvement, Adams and McGuinness have shifted the movement onto a political path. Today they have taken this to its logical conclusion by dropping the armed wing to concentrate on elections. No doubt, they will also seek to drive from political life nationalists parties like the SDLP and Fianna Fáil, who do little about partition. In all of this, the modern republicans can legitimately claim to be following some of Connolly's advice. But the last more crucial element of his argument runs exactly counter to their current strategy. Namely, that the goal of struggle against empire should be a socialist republic.

Connolly's argument was elegantly simple. Workers did not simply revolt for ideals drawn from the past. Nor did they compartmentalise the form of oppression they had to fight. Once in struggle against an empire, their consciousness tended to widen to look for the full liberation of their class. It is ridiculous, Connolly, argued to

'talk of revolting against British rule and refuse to recognise the fact that our way to freedom can only be hewn by the strong hand of labour, and that labour revolts against oppression of all kinds, not merely the peculiarly British brand'.³⁶

And

No amount of protestations could convince intelligent workers that the class which grinds them down to industrial slavery can, at the same time, be leading them forward to national liberty.³⁷

The reason why this message was so radical was that it ran up against a key tenet of all republican organisations from Connolly's time to today. Namely, that at least until Irish independence was achieved and partition removed, there had to be national unity between the Irish people. The republican movement has at various times taken up the concerns of its working class supporters and articulated them in left republican language. Typically, it has

talked of adding a 'social agenda' or proposing an 'Ireland of the Equals'. But no matter how radical this may sound at a rhetorical level, a space is always kept for unity between all classes of Irish people who want impendence and the removal of partition. In other words, republican movements tend to aspire to create a pan-nationalist alliance where they win hegemony. To form such an alliance, it is commonly argued, that socialist politics must be left aside – because otherwise it would scare off potential supporters.

This dynamic is best illustrated in the politics of modern republicanism. Its current strategy is to get into government on both sides of the border in order to speed up the ending of partition. The Sinn Féin leadership have made it clear that they are prepared to join with Fianna Fáil if necessary. Referring to coalition, party spokesperson, Caoimhín Ó Caoileán has said, 'Make no mistake about it, however, this is a nettle that Sinn Féin will grasp. The only question is when. The only party that we would absolutely rule out are the Progressive Democrats'.³⁸ Similarly, in pursuit of their goals the party has been willing to maintain relationship with the US regime, even while it is conducting an occupation in Iraq. The apparent logic is that the US can play a progressive role in nudging Britain to an all-Ireland agenda. Given the requirement to form such alliances, there is little wonder that the party has increasingly dropped all references to socialism.

Connolly's approach to anti-imperialism was very different. His main argument with 'the advanced' nationalists at the turn of the last century, was precisely that they should break from a 'union of classes. To the objection that a fight for a socialist republic would frighten off potential allies he made this devastating reply.

It may be pleaded that the ideal of a Socialist Republic, implying, as it does, a complete political and economic revolution would be sure to alienate all our middle-class and aristocratic supporters, who would dread the loss of their property and privileges.

What does this objection mean? That we must conciliate the privileged classes in Ireland! But you can only disarm their hostility by assuring them that in a *free* Ireland their 'privileges' will not be interfered with. That is to say, you must guarantee that when Ireland is free of foreign domination, the green-coated Irish soldiers will guard the fraudulent gains of capitalist and landlord from 'the thin hands of the poor' just as remorselessly and just as effectually as the scarlet-coated emissaries of England do today.

On no other basis will the classes unite with you. Do you expect the masses to fight for this ideal?³⁹

Not surprisingly this led Connolly into many arguments with the republicans of his day. During the commemoration for the 1798 uprising, he attacked the 'lying twaddle ... about the Society of the United Irishmen being a "Union of all Classes"' claiming that in fact in this Irish edition of the French revolution, the classes were never so sharply divided. He set up his own Rank and File '98 Club to oppose any unity with the compromised Home Rule politicians. He claimed that

The cry for a 'union of classes' is in reality an insidious move on the part of our Irish master class to have the powers of government transferred from the hands of the English capitalist government into the hands of an Irish capitalist government and to pave the way for this change by inducing the Irish workers to abandon all hopes of bettering his position⁴⁰

Labour and Irish History

Connolly's masterpiece, *Labour and Irish History*, was written as a continuation of this early argument. It appeared in 1910 having taken him twelve years to complete. It is a marvellous piece of socialist propaganda that is written in a direct and passionate style. For anyone brought up on the history of Ireland's 700 hundred year struggle against Britain, it is essential reading. Traditionally this story was told as a long struggle where one generation of nationalist heroes is replaced by another. The only foil to their bravery was either the apathy of the masses or the intrigues of traitors.

Labour and Irish History tears this powerful myth apart. The Jacobite hero, Sarsfield, is shown to be a feudal lord who did not fight for the freedom of Ireland but rather 'to secure that the class who then enjoyed the privileges of robbing the Irish people should not be compelled to give way to a fresh horde of land thieves'.⁴¹ The Wild Geese, who became the subject of many ballads, are depicted as fallen aristocrats who became mercenaries and then took the side of England against the French revolution.

The book reserves its special hatred for the two major parliamentary figures, Henry Grattan and Daniel O'Connell. Grattan despised the very volunteers who were later to take his name. He denounced them as an 'armed rabble', once the limited goal of free trade and constitutional reform had been won in 1782. Daniel O'Connell was the personification of the conservatism of the Irish bourgeoisie. He began his career as a yeoman who helped to put down the Emmet rising and then broke the secular tradition of Wolfe Tone by making the national movement the plaything of the Catholic Church. O'Connell had a special contempt for organised labour and attacked the 'tyranny exercised by trade unionists in Dublin'. He voted against laws to ban child labour in the mines, claiming it would end civilisation as we know it.

If O'Connell is the butt of Connolly's class hatred, then the Young Irelanders are treated with his special contempt. This pale shadow of the European wide revolutionary movement of 1848 produced more poets than fighters. Connolly recounts how one of their leaders, William Smith O'Brien, refused to let the peasants of Mullinahone cut down the tress to make barricades because he was 'as rabidly solicitous about the rights of the landlord as were the chiefs of the English government'.⁴² And this in the midst of the great famine!

Connolly's aim was not to catalogue a tale of horrors but rather to use the historical evidence to convince the most militant nationalists that 'a union of classes' led to disaster. Central to his argument is the cowardice of the Irish bourgeoisie. With the exception of a brief period between 1798 and 1803, their record is one of appalling betrayal. Using an argument that Marx developed from his experience of the 1848 revolution in Germany, Connolly claimed that as the system gets older, the bourgeoisie become more conservative and frightened of the working class below them. They become a pale, cowardly shadow of their forefathers who staged the French revolution.

There was, however, an additional factor at work. The Irish rich

have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism as against every historical attachment drawing them towards Irish patriotism; only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for Irish freedom.⁴³

In terms of the Marxist tradition, the nearest approach to Connolly's was Trotsky's writings on permanent revolution. Most socialists in Russia at the time believed that the country was too backward for socialism and that the coming revolution against the Tsar would have a capitalist character. Against this orthodoxy Trotsky employed a similar argument to Connolly's to point to the conservatism of the Russian capitalist class and to argue they would not lead the struggle. Moreover, he asked, if workers were to take their place in the fight for democratic freedom, why, if they were victorious, would they stop at the limits set by capitalist social relations and not press on to construct a socialist society?. Although they employed different theoretical frameworks, both Connolly and Trotsky came to the same conclusion – in a backward society there was no reason to delay starting the fight for socialism.

Workers' unity

In 1912, Connolly sent a telegram to the offices of the *Irish Worker* in Dublin. It stated that 'the long continued and elaborately arranged attempt of the Orange Ascendancy to foment religious feeling in Belfast has at last been crowned with success'.⁴⁴ The telegram was deadly accurate.

Ever since, 1909 the British parliament was locked into a crisis as Conservatives took up the cause of the Union to stymie attempts by the Liberal Party to bring reform. The Conservative Party leader Bonar Law told the Unionists that he would back, 'whatever steps you may feel compelled to take, whether they are constitutional or whether they in the long run they are unconstitutional'.⁴⁵ Edward Carson, already famous for prosecuting Oscar Wilde, rushed to stoke up a violent opposition to Home Rule. By the end of July 1912, 3000 workers had been expelled from their jobs, one fifth of them Protestant, with socialist or Liberal sympathies.

Connolly was an organiser for the ITGWU in Belfast at the time and had to take a position on these divisions among workers. He was 'brutally blunt' about where he stood.

A real socialist movement cannot be built by temporising in front of the dying cause of Orange ascendancy...

Therefore we declare to the Orange workers of Belfast that we stand for the right of the people of Ireland to rule, as well as to own, Ireland and cannot conceive of a separation of the two ideas, and to all and sundry we announce as Socialists we are Home Rulers, but on the day the Home Rule Government goes in to power, the Socialist movement will go into opposition.⁴⁶

He had few illusions what the granting of Home Rule would bring. He called the Home Rule party 'a slimy capitalist organisation... fighting to maintain every kind of reaction and obscurantism in Irish cities'.⁴⁷ He believed that if Home Rule was introduced it would be quickly be followed by an attack on organised labour as the Irish wealthy established a regime of exploitation. When the Irish Parliamentary Party called for unity to get Home Rule, Connolly was caustic in his reply,

Every oppressor of the poor, every heartless sweeter, every enemy of progress and champion of reaction feels perfectly safe in Ireland as long as the cry of 'national unity' paralyses the hand of the friend of progress and forbids open warfare against the Irish oppressor and reactionist who shelters behind the Green or Orange Flag.⁴⁸

So it was not a question of wrapping the Green flag around him and joining the national community. Connolly defended Home Rule because it was a legitimate democratic demand and it would open the way for class politics to emerge in Ireland. It was not a question of what background a socialist came from – rather what side they took on democratic rights.

Later, in response to the Orange reaction, the Liberal Party began to betray their Home Rule allies and move to an acceptance of partition. Once again, Connolly was adamantly opposed to partition, claiming it would produce a 'carnival or reaction' where Irish politics would be dominated by two right wing blocks for decades. Partition would help 'the Home Rule and Orange capitalists and clerics to keep their rallying cries before the public as the political watchwords of the day'.⁴⁹ How prophetic he was!

While opposing loyalism vigorously, Connolly was also determined to open a political space for Protestant workers. He called for special propaganda 'for the conversion to socialism of Orangemen'.⁵⁰ Part of that meant exploding the myth that the Orange Order stood for civil and religious liberty. In a marvellous article on July 12th, Connolly showed, for example, that William of Orange was actually supported by the Pope during the Battle of the Boyne and that the Te Deum was sung in the Vatican to celebrate his victory. He pointed to how Protestant tenants were abused by Protestant landlords and that the only difference between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestant was that one was 'despoiled by force' and the other by fraud.⁵¹

Forging workers' unity, however, was not simply a matter of words. Connolly combined his attack on Orangeism with an open appeal to Catholic and Protestant workers to fight alongside each other. When thousands of Catholics and 'rotten prods' were expelled from their jobs in 1912, Connolly called a march which was led by the Non-Sectarian Labour Band. He had nothing to do with Joe Devlin's exclusive appeal to Catholics to come to the rescue of their Northern brethren. Connolly also recruited workers from the Larne aluminium plant into the ITGWU when the town was a noted bastion of Orangeism. His strategy was to encourage a militant joint struggle between Catholic and Protestant workers and in the course of that struggle to take up the issue Orangesim.

Crucial to his argument for winning Protestant workers was his vision of what type of Ireland he wanted. Only a bold call for a socialist Ireland rather than an Ireland united on a capitalist and clericalist basis could hold any appeal to Protestant workers. There was no future for Protestant workers in a capitalist Ireland where the green flag fluttered.

When the Sinn Feiner speaks to men who are fighting against low wages and tells them that the Sinn Fein body has promised lots of Irish labour at low wages to any foreign capitalist who wished to establish in Ireland, what wonder if they come to believe that a change from Toryism to Sinn Feinism would simply be a change from the devil they do know to the devil they do not.⁵²

Could republicans be won?

These were Connolly's views on the national question. But how to make progress? Here an understandable but important source of confusion crept into this writings – that was to have more important consequences later.

From his early days in Ireland, Connolly adopted a strategy of winning over the republicans to socialism. This did not simply mean winning individuals from republicanism to socialism but rather taking the tradition lock, stock and barrel to the left. His argument was two fold. First, England's conquest of Ireland had uprooted Ireland original 'socialistic' civilisation and therefore undoing the conquest meant a return to this original state of affairs. Second, the road to Irish capitalism was closed because the global market was already over full of goods. There was little prospect that Irish capitalism would break from the empire and even if it did, it would not find the markets to survive. Accordingly, the earnest Irish nationalist would have to draw logical conclusions and to move left.

At time, there were some small signs of this. Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein, was always an ardent pro-capitalist, whose ambition was to establish a Gaelic Manchester. But, oddly, he maintained quite a friendly relationship with Connolly and in 1902 supported an ISRP candidate for Dublin corporation. Later when the Sinn Fein party was formed, it drew its support predominantly from left trade unionists like P.T. Daly. In 1908, for example, a Sinn Fein representative W.E. Cole addressed the Dublin Trades Council on the theme of 'Sinn Fein, the Workers and the Nationalisation of Irish Trade Unions'. He claimed that 'Sinn Fein is wide enough and all-embracing enough to take the best of socialism' and Sean McDermott, who was also present, called on socialists to join Sinn Fein so that 'they would not be tied to the tail of English socialism'.⁵⁴

However, despite these signs, Connolly had in fact exaggerated the radical potential of republicanism. True, it often drew its support from the workers and the poor. At its best, in the case of Fintan Lalor, it promoted the needs of the nation over the privileged classes within it. But ultimately, republicanism saw the key divide as nation rather than class and so there was nothing intrinsically within it that excluded support for Irish capitalism. In fact, at particular historical junctures, radical republicanism might become the vehicle by which this class made advances - as Fianna Fail subsequently showed.

This, however, is all a matter of hindsight. In Connolly's defence, it should be noted that, at the time he wrote, no radical nationalist movement had ever come to power. There was no experience of anti-imperialist movements defeating the colonial powers and coming to government. Hence, it was more credible to believe that they would automatically move to the left - provided they were uncompromising in their beliefs.

The experience of the long twentieth century, however, tells a different story. Every nationalist movement, no matter how radical its views, has eventually made its peace with imperialism once they have reached power. To cite only a few examples: Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF were the most radical fighters in Zimbabwe against white privilege and even claimed to be 'marxists' - but once in power Mugabe brought in Structural Adjustment Programmes at the behest of the IMF and World Bank. The ANC led the most courageous struggle against apartheid - but once in power adopted the most conventional of neoliberal economic programmes. The Iranian revolution of 1979 denounced the US as the 'great Satan' but when Bush went to war in Afghanistan they swapped intelligence with the devil himself!

The building of a separate and distinct socialist current must therefore be a vital addition to Connolly's outlook.

Chapter 3: Be Practical - We Only Want the Earth

Ireland's largest union, SIPTU, recently sponsored a pamphlet entitled 'The Voice of a Thinking Intelligent Movement: James Larkin Junior and the Ideological Modernisation of Irish Trade Unionism'.⁵⁴ Hardly a short pithy title but it contained an interesting assumption. Namely, that unions had to rely on muscle and brawn in the past to claim their rights but now they could use their brains and intelligence.

This novel mind-body distinction has become a recurrent theme. Genuine, heart felt commemorations are held for founders of the movement like James Larkin Senior (father of Larkin junior in title above) and James Connolly. But these figures are then bracketed off as belonging to a long distant era when muscle had to be used. The modern unions, it is claimed, can engage as equals with employers through social partnership and make real gains through their intelligence.

It is a smug and false distinction. The real dividing line is not between brains and brawn but rather between class struggle trade unionism and business unionism. Connolly and Larkin showed considerable intelligence as class fighters. By contrast, the modern union movement sometimes shows a distinct lack of 'intelligence' when it signs up to partnership deals that weaken the fighting ability of their members.

Class struggle trade unionism

Connolly saw the union as the main organisation for pursuing the class war and never hid his ultimate goals. In a popular pamphlet he produced in 1909, *Socialism Made Easy*, he adopted the following question- answer format:

Would you confiscate the property of the capitalist class and rob men of that which they have, perhaps, worked a whole life time to accumulate?

Yes sir, and certainly not.

We would certainly confiscate the property of the capitalist class, but we do not propose to rob anyone. On the contrary, we propose to establish honesty once and forever as the basis of our social relations. This Socialist movement is indeed worthy to be entitled 'The Great Anti-Theft Movement of the Twentieth Century'.⁵⁵

The modern union official will see the above statement as somewhat 'extreme' and more than a little 'impractical'. Typically, he or she will be claim that confiscation of capitalist property will never happen and so it is better to concentrate on gaining reforms. Talk of revolution is seen as wild-eyed rhetoric which detracts from being practical. Connolly made a devastating reply to this critique.

Yet, although it may seem a paradox to say so, there is no party so incapable of achieving practical results as an orthodox political party; and there is no party so certain of placing moderate reforms to its credit as an extreme - a revolutionary party.

The possessing classes will and do laugh to scorn every scheme for the amelioration of the workers so long as those responsible for the initiation of the scheme admit as justifiable the "rights of property"; but when the public attention is directed towards questioning the

Justifiable nature of those "rights" in themselves, then the munter class, alarmed for the safety of their booty, yield reform after reform - in order to prevent revolution.

Moral - Don't be "practical" in politics. To be practical in that sense means that you have schooled yourself to think along the lines and in the grooves those who rob you would desire you to think.⁵⁶

The subtlety of his approach should not be lost. Others, such as De Leon, treated reforms as 'banana skins' under the feet of workers or 'palliatives' which clouded their vision about the ultimate goal. By contrast, Connolly suggested a dialectical unity between reform and revolution. Like Rosa Luxemburg, he argued, that revolutionaries were the best fighters for reform precisely because they did not accept the limits set by the system. By waging all-out war they stood a better chance of forcing employers to grant reforms. And to extend Connolly's argument a little further, winning reforms in this manner ultimately strengthened the potential for revolution as it showed the power workers could yield.

The links between reform and revolution are key to understanding Connolly's approach to trade unionism. Trade unions are mass organisations which both oppose the logic of capitalism but are also shaped by it. They bargain over wages and conditions rather than the fact of wage slavery and their day to day practice is based on gaining small concessions. Connolly's point, however, was they would win more provided they acted as revolutionary unions.

Syndicalism

Connolly came across the philosophy of syndicalism through his experiences with the IWW in America. At its most basic, this was a movement committed to destroying capitalism through revolutionary industrial struggles. Its hey day was in the early twentieth century when it was strongly influential in the formation of the CGT in France and found an echo in a number of general unions in Britain and Ireland due to the activity of Tom Mann's Syndicalist Education League. Synicalists wanted to form industrial unions, which linked together the skilled and unskilled, and looked forward to the day when these joined to form One Big Union.

Connolly stressed the importance of industrial unions for a socialist strategy. His call for One Big Union had nothing to do with the subsequent ambition of William O'Brien, his successor as leader of the ITGWU, to form one bureaucratic union. Connolly advanced two specific reasons why workers should organise on industrial lines.

First, divisions between workers led to political confusion and a growth of reformist politics. By contrast, industrial unionism would bring a new clarity.

As political parties are the reflex of economic conditions, it follows that industrial unity once established will create the political unity of the working class. I feel we cannot too strongly insist on this point. Political division is born of industrial division. Political scabbery is born of industrial craft scabbery. Political weakness keeps even step with industrial weakness.⁵⁷

Second, industrial unionism would help construct the framework for a future socialist society. Connolly used the analogy of war to explain:

Every fresh shop or factory organised under the control [of industrial unions] is a fort wrenched from control of the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the Revolution to be held by them for the workers.⁵⁸

The industrial republic could be built up within the shell of capitalism as workers encroached on the powers of management at workplace level. They could push back the 'frontiers of control' so that employer ownership and rights of management became a mere formality. In the longer run the political state could be engulfed by countless workplaces, organised under the banner of industrial unionism.

Connolly saw this as 'the swiftest, safest and most peaceful' way of achieving socialism.⁵⁹ Once industrial unions had been built up, the transition from capitalism to socialism would be comparatively easy.

We will be able to estimate our capacity for the revolutionary act of Social Transformation simply by taking stock of the number of industries we control and their relative importance to the whole social system, and when we find we control the strategic industries in society, then society must bend to our will - or break.⁶⁰

Connolly's vision of a socialist society was one of total democracy. The state structure of a capitalist society was unsuitable for a society founded on workers control. One reason was that the parliament was based on electoral constituencies which were drawn on a territorial basis to disguise the class divisions. Typically, large working class housing estates were linked to upper middle class residential areas in the one constituency.

By contrast, in a socialist society the workplace would be made the centre of democratic decision making. Its advantage over geographical constituencies was that representatives would remain in daily contact with their constituents. In this way, they would be subject to democratic control because they would have to explain why they voted in particular ways to those they work alongside. Connolly's ultimate hope was that the political state would actually disappear.

The socialist republic of the future will function through the unions industrially organised... the principle of democratic control will operate through the workers correctly organised in such industrial unions and ... the political territorial state will have no place or function under socialism⁶¹

There are important strengths to these arguments - but also crucial theoretical weaknesses which had practical conclusions.

Connolly underestimated the power of reformist ideas because he reduced a political question to an organisational issue. If the workers joined industrial unions, then political weakness would simply disappear. However, this can hardly be the case. The aspiration to reform the system rather than overthrow it, reflects the power of ideology in society. Workers are constantly told that they are incapable of running their own affairs - that they need experts and entrepreneurs who are more talented than they. The education system and the mass media constantly suggest that competition is natural and any co-operative enterprise would be 'inefficient'. And many come to accept these ideological arguments. All of which implies a need to combat reformist ideas by political means. By ignoring this, Connolly ultimately played down the need for a distinct revolutionary party.

Socialism Made Easy also failed to recognise how trade unions are essentially defensive organisations which both oppose and are shaped by capitalism. Typically they produce a union bureaucracy which bargains with the employers but also sets limits on the nature of union struggles. Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, explained why.

The [bureaucracy] becomes divorced from the masses it has regimented and removes itself from the eddies and currents of fickle whims and foolish ambitions that are to be expected in the excitable broad masses. The union thus acquires the ability to negotiate agreements and take on responsibilities. In this way, it obliges the employer to acknowledge a certain legality in his dealings with workers, a legality that is conditional on his faith in the union's solvency and its capacity to secure respect for contracted obligations from the working masses.

The emergence of industrial legality is a great victory for the working class but it is not the ultimate and definitive victory.⁶²

After Connolly's death, a bureaucracy took ever greater control over the very industrial union that Connolly and Larkin had created – the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

Connolly's vision of a union movement slowly accumulating its strength under capitalism is also not borne out by historical experience. His view is, as we have already indicated, based on a false analogy with how the capitalist class built up its economic power within the shell of feudalism. However the only resources which workers have are solidarity and organisation and these cannot be accumulated mechanically. Sometimes solidarity breaks down because sections of workers are too frightened of starvation and poverty. The experience of the IWW itself showed this. Typically it grew in a whirlwind of agitation, jumping from just 300 members in Lawrence before a famous 1912 strike to 16,000 a year later. But the following year again, it had fallen back to 700 members due to defeats.

However, given all these weaknesses, Connolly still had the most militant view of how unions should fight. And without this militancy, mass unionisation could not have been achieved in Ireland.

In Dublin City in 1913

Dublin at the end of the 19th century was a city of slums. The employers' spokesperson Arnold Wright noted that if you ascended Nelson's pillar in the centre you could count the factories on the fingers of one hand. The Dublin working class were concentrated in transport, ferrying out agricultural produce to the metropolis. The majority of workers were employed as casual labourers, fearful that the huge pools of poverty created many rivals for their jobs.

Yet this city became the focal point of an intense class struggle led by James Connolly and Jim Larkin. True, they may not have been 'pure' Marxists, with Larkin in particular surging towards great feats of rhetoric, combining an appeal to Jesus Christ with demands for class solidarity. But, boy, did they bring about a real movement of their class.

Between 1911 and 1913 the most militant form of class war was fought in the city. Lord Asquith, the government's chief conciliator, summed up the situation:

'While the disputes in the ports and inland cities of Great Britain had been chiefly based on economic causes, the serious riots in Dublin, although founded on poverty, low wages and bad conditions, included a determination to establish... "one big union" and put into practice the doctrines of syndicalism. The influences [for] the overthrow of capitalism and revolution against existing authorities were all present.'⁶³

For once this upper class spokesperson was correct. The industrial weakness of workers was compensated by an intense militancy that was informed by anti-capitalist politics. The 'solidarity strike' lay at the heart of the strategy of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. As Connolly put it,

No consideration of any contract with a section of the capitalist class absolved any section of us from taking instant action to protect other sections when said sections were in danger from the capitalist enemy.

Our attitude always was that in the swiftness and unexpectedness of our action lay our chief hopes of temporary victory, and since permanent victory was an illusory hope until permanent victory was secured, temporary victories were all that need concern us.⁶⁴

This anti-capitalist message was promoted on a weekly basis by the *Irish Worker*, a newspaper with a mass sale of 18,000 a week. The paper targeted scabs by name, roared and jeered at the employers, and educated vast numbers of workers about class struggle and opposition to this system.

Between 1910 and 1912, the ITGWU grew from 4,000 members to 22,000. It was able to organise the 'unorganised' because it instilled a message of solidarity among its members. Its success terrified Ireland's nationalist employers because Home Rule appeared to be around the corner and the last thing they wanted was a resurgent working class. The 1913 Lock-Out arose because the Irish rich wanted to crush the union before an independent parliament was established.

The employer class found their spokesperson in William Martin Murphy, a prominent supporter of the Home Rule party and owner of the *Irish Independent*. Murphy wanted to defeat on the ITGWU so that it eventually turned into an 'ordinary trade union of the English type'⁶⁵ and co-operate with the nationalist leaders.

The lockout began on August 15 when Murphy arrived at the dispatch office of the *Irish Independent* and ordered staff to leave the union. Forty workers who refused were instantly sacked. The ITGWU responded by bringing out the drivers on Murphy's Dublin Tram Company for a lightning strike. A large open air rally was held to support the strikers but the next next day leaders of the ITGWU were arrested and charged with sedition.

Another open air rally was prohibited by Justice Swift, a shareholder in Murphy's company but Connolly and Larkin called for defiance. For this Connolly was given a three month prison sentence while Larkin went into hiding only to eventually appear on the balcony of a hotel on O Connell St. Later that evening the police took their revenge in what became known as Bloody Sunday when two workers were killed and over 600 people were taken to hospital as a result of their baton charge. Emboldened by this level of state support, the employers called a general lockout from September 3rd.

Connolly began a hunger strike to protest at his imprisonment and was soon released. Thereupon he took over the leadership of a struggle with 20,000 workers locked out. One

of the first things he did was to form the Irish Citizen Army in response to the police brutality. It was the first workers' militia in Europe and the advertisement for the inaugural meeting read:

Let the workers keep clear of the Girondin (moderate) politicians who will simply use the workers as the means to their own security and comfort. Let others who may, prate about 'the rights and liberties common to all Irishmen'. We are out for the right to work and eat and live.⁶⁶

Connolly and Larkin also spread the strike to Britain and ten thousand railway men came out in Liverpool, Birmingham, Derby, Sheffield and Crewe. Union leaders, such as J.T. Thomas, attacked this rank and file response and eventually pressurised them back to work.

This set back further strengthened the employers and they rejected all efforts at compromise. When the children of strikers were moved to Britain to avoid suffering, they whipped up a Catholic hysteria about 'godless England.' True to form, the Bishops issued a pastoral letter to denounce the ITGWU for moving the children. Six days after the pastoral, Larkin was jailed for seven months for incitement. The full might of state and church was mobilised to defeat the workers.

Sadly, that was not all. Many republicans such as Padraig Pearse supported the union but others did not. Arthur Griffith and Sinn Féin denounced Larkinism as an imported evil. The Irish Republican Brotherhood refused to take a stance. Later as they played a behind the scenes role in forming the National Volunteers, they co-operated with Lawrence Kettle, a strong opponent of the workers.

Connolly was sharply critical of nationalist attitudes to the strike. They opposed the use of the sympathetic strike but then denounced British trade unionists for not doing enough for the Dublin workers. In the aftermath a myth developed in nationalist Ireland that English workers had let the Irish down - rather than the union bureaucrats, no matter what their nationality. Connolly countered these arguments brilliantly,

We are told that the English people contribute their help to our enslavement. It is true. It is also true that the Irish people contributed soldiers to duly crush every democratic movement of the English people from the deportation of Irish soldiers to serve the cause of political despotism under Charles I to the days of Featherstone and Asquith. Slaves themselves the English people, helped to enslave others; slaves themselves the Irish people helped to enslave others. There is no room for recrimination.... The first duty of the working class of the world is to settle accounts with the master class of the world - that of their own country at the head of the list. To that point this struggle, as all other such struggles, is converging.⁶⁷

The Dublin workers were defeated in 1913 by the full might of the state, the employers and the church. Contrary to later mythology, it was not a draw. Hundreds were victimised and those who got their jobs back were often forced to sign a form disowning the ITGWU. In the longer term, though, a tradition of militant trade unionism had sunk roots in the Irish working class. During the War of Independence this would be re-ignited and draw tens of thousands of new recruits into the unions. In the shorter term, however, the defeat was to have wider consequences in the decisive years that followed.

A missed opportunity

Great struggles like those of 1913 strip away the veils of pretence and reveal the fundamental conflict at the heart of society. Potentially, they can politicise tens of thousands who see for themselves how society works. But where was the socialist party for workers to join in 1913?

In reaction to his experience in America, Connolly had embarked on a rather complicated strategy of party building and proposed two distinct types of political organisations.

First, he proposed the formation of a Labour Party at the Clonmel conference of the Irish Trade Union Congress in 1912. This he envisaged as a broad, non-socialist body that would be the municipal and parliamentary wing of the unions. Almost everyone believed that Home Rule was coming and labour needed representation in the new structures that followed. Even while proposing such a party, Connolly remained a revolutionary socialist, claiming that while he supported greater state intervention in the economy, he was against 'mere government socialism'.⁶⁸

The Labour Party never actually came into existence during Connolly's lifetime as its fate was tied to Home Rule. It remained a vehicle for issuing statements and lobbying government ministers until its rebirth after World War 1.

Connolly's main energies were directed towards a socialist party - but in a manner that was shaped by his syndicalist approach. A Socialist Party of Ireland had, in fact, been formed in 1909 before Connolly's return from America and he soon became an enthusiastic organiser on his return. At first the party seemed to develop very well with former Sinn Féin councillors like P.T. Daly joining it. Connolly also stressed the need for socialist unity and made strenuous efforts to link up with the mainly Northern based Independent Labour Party.

One of the ways he did this was to engage in debate with its Belfast leader William Walker. Connolly exposed the latter's sham 'gas and water' form of politics which talked about internationalism but in reality was tied to Empire. As a result of these debates, many ILP members began to look to the SPI and on Easter Monday 1912 a new united socialist party, the Independent Labour Party (Ireland), was formed. The new party proclaimed the dawn of class politics,

The watchwords and rallying cries of the various parties led by various factions of our master class are but sound and fury... it is no longer a question of Celt against Saxon or Catholic or Protestant but of all workers against all exploiters.⁶⁹

However, Connolly's syndicalism relegated the ILP to a largely propagandist organisation. It made general arguments for socialism but was not a vehicle for day to day agitation. Assuming that Home Rule was about to be delivered, the party decided not to take a position on the national question, believing that the issue would be removed from Irish politics.

This vague, propagandist approach and failure to settle key political questions led to tremendous confusion, particularly as the conflict over Home Rule intensified. Moreover, as the industrial conflict grew Connolly came to regard the ILP as a sort of shadow organisation. No effort was made to recruit large numbers of workers to it. The party went

into the Lockout with a few score active members - and came out of it with the same number.

Connolly's misfortune was to face into the great imperialist war that started in 1914 in the context of a defeated working class and without a revolutionary socialist party that could deal with the tumultuous events to come.

Chapter 4: War and Revolution

1914 was an appalling year for James Connolly as defeat piled up on defeat. In February, the ITGWU was finally beaten in the great lock-out. March and April brought the Curragh mutiny when British officers refused to move against the Orange Order which was then importing guns. In July, partition became a virtual certainty when Home Rule leaders entered negotiations with the Unionists at a conference in Buckingham Place. On top of all that, August brought war and the collapse of the Socialist International!

Connolly had to deal with these changes virtually alone. The main networks he had helped to create - the ITGWU and the small socialist party, the ILP - were either weakened or severely disorientated. It is tribute to his indomitable spirit that he fought with tenacity against a system that brought so much bloodshed and suffering.

Soon after Connolly's death, the playwright Sean O Casey wrote a history of the Irish Citizen Army. O Casey had been secretary of the ICA and throughout his life showed a particular sympathy with the working class women of Dublin tenements. But he was also deeply cynical of any involvement in the fight for independence. Even to this day, his plays mock the pretensions of republican fighters - sometimes with telling accuracy but also, unfortunately, with a dismissal their struggle. Not surprising then, his reference to Connolly at this time was couched in the language of betrayal.

Jim Connolly had stepped from the narrow byway of Irish socialism onto the broad and crowded highway of Irish nationalism... The high creed of Irish nationalism became his daily rosary, while the higher creed of international humanity that had so long bubbled from his eloquent lips was silent forever and Irish labour lost a leader.⁷⁰

This description of Connolly's last years has left behind a myth which right wing forces have used since. It was more than convenient for priests and Fianna Failers to pretend that Connolly had ceased to be a socialist and had 'returned' to the mainstream of Irish nationalism. That way they could safely pay tribute to his martyrdom while ignoring his Marxist message. On the other side of the border, the same story could be used to warn of the danger of Irish socialism slipping into Fenianism. One of his biographers, Arthur Morgan, claimed that Connolly had deserted socialism to join a rebellion that 'had the ring of a militarised state about it'.⁷¹

Sean O Casey's claim that Connolly had deserted socialism made the classical mistake of separating workers economic struggles from the political struggle against Empire. His approach is similar to those who oppose neo-liberalism today but who are distinctly unenthusiastic about the fight against US imperialism because Islamic movements play an important role. This approach, either then or now, fails to see that imperialism arises out of capitalist competition and that its defeat helps workers everywhere. Connolly's willingness to fight the largest empire of his day is to be commended -whatever confusions crept into his thought at times. The tragedy was that he fought without the backing of a strong socialist movement and that left a lasting legacy on Ireland.

A war to defend empire

WW1 broke out on August 4, 1914 and unleashed such an outbreak of savagery that it is rightly known as the first 'total war'. The Second International – the grouping which linked socialist parties together – had long known it was coming and was pledged to resist. In 1912, it warned its affiliates that if it broke out, they 'were to utilise the economic and political crisis created by war to rouse the masses and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist rule'.⁷² The tragedy was that few socialist parties stuck to this pledge. Reformist currents had grown inside the movement and had already developed ties to 'their' respective states.

The case of the German Social Democratic Party, illustrates this neatly. Just over a week before the declaration of war, the SDP had denounced war and socialist mass meetings had adopted strongly worded resolutions stating that 'The warmongers must realise that if a war break outs with all its sufferings and atrocities, the political and economic crisis caused by it will inevitably... powerfully accelerate the development of the capitalist order towards socialism'.⁷³ Leading party officials such as Friedrich Ebert transferred large sums of money to Switzerland in preparation for a crackdown. However within days, the opposition of the SPD dissipated. The party had become an electoral machine and feared annihilation at the polls. Its huge bureaucratic apparatus, which employed 11,000 people, stood on the point of destruction. The old fears of Russia and the desire to stand by 'the fatherland' in its hour of danger won out.

Connolly faced a similar experience when he attended the first ILP branch meeting in Belfast after the outbreak of war. There he found that Tom Johnson, the future leader of the Irish Labour Party, favoured a victory for the Allies as being 'better for the growth of liberty and democratic ideals'.⁷⁴ The other members voted to suspend all public meetings in Belfast lest they lead to violent opposition. Connolly had to stage street meetings against the war under the name of a fictitious organisation: the Belfast Section of the Irish Citizen army. The *Irish Worker* reported Connolly's candid remark that, 'like all other parties his own was divided in opinion [on the war].. For that reason he made it clear that his opinions were personal and did not bind others who spoke from the platform'.⁷⁵

Despite the utter cowardice of his comrades, Connolly held on to an internationalist spirit. He wrote, 'To me the socialist of another country is a fellow patriot as the capitalist of my own is a natural enemy'.⁷⁶ He reserved his special contempt for those who argued that they had done all they could to prevent war but once it had been declared they had to defend their country.

What then becomes of all our resolutions, all our protests of fraternisation; all our threats of general strikes; all our carefully built machinery of internationalism; all our hope for the future? Were they all as sound and fury, signifying nothing?

When the German artilleryman, a socialist serving in the German army of invasion, sends a shell into the ranks of the French army, blowing off their heads, tearing out their bowels and mangling the limbs of dozens of socialist comrades in that force, will the fact that he, before leaving for the front, 'demonstrated' against war be of any value to the widows and orphans made by the shell he sent upon its mission of murder?

Or when the French rifleman pours his murderous rifle fire into the ranks of the German line of attack, will he be able to derive any comfort from the probability that his bullets are

murdering or maiming comrades who last year joined in thundering 'hochs' and cheers of greeting to the eloquent Jaures, when in Berlin he pleaded for international solidarity?⁷⁷

He did not regard the war as the result of 'mistaken' policies or caused by a particularly evil politicians in London or Berlin. Nor did he think it could be stopped by pleas for moderation. He was not particular impressed by a pacifist approach which made humanitarian appeals and called on individuals to morally refuse to service. Rather, Connolly took up the classic socialist position that war arose out of capitalism and was a form of competition by other means. As long as that system existed, there was a danger of war.

We have held and do hold that war is a relic of barbarism only possible because we are governed by a ruling class with barbaric ideas; we have held and do hold that the working class of all countries cannot hope to escape the horrors of war until in all countries the barbarous ruling class is thrown from power.⁷⁸

This clear anti-war stance was well in advance of the dominant opinion of the day. From very start, he set out to combat the lies and jingoism of the pro-war media. Rather similar to the propaganda today, the German 'enemy' was demonised as fanatical and bloody minded, willing to carry out the most atrocious war crimes against the brave soldiers of the British empire. Connolly replied by documenting the record of the British empire, pointing to the slaughter of African fighters in the Sudan in 1898 or the concentration camps set up for women and children during the Boer war. To counter the stories about 'poor little Belgium', he quoted from Roger Casement and a host of missionaries to expose the outrages that the Belgium king committed in the Congo. He continually attacked John Redmond and the Home Rule party for acting as recruiting sergeants for an empire that sent millions of young men to their deaths.

Sometimes Connolly contrasted Britain with the more 'peaceful methods' of the German empire. He also drew on a mechanical type of Marxism to claim that Germany was more progressive than Britain because it was advancing industrially. But although some have tried to exaggerate his 'pro-German' stance, they rather miss the point.⁷⁹ Connolly saw his main battle with his own empire and his softness on Germany only helped to sharpen the arguments against the war mongers at home. He had no sympathy for the German Kaiser, noting that 'German military bullies, like all tyrannies among civilised people need fear nothing so much as native (German) democracy'.⁸⁰

His solution to war was summed up in one word: revolution.

'The signal for war' he wrote 'ought to have been the signal of rebellion... when the bugle sounded the first note of actual war, their notes should have been taken as the tocsin for social revolution'.⁸¹

Hindsight fully justifies Connolly's vision. WW1 was ended by, not one, but two revolutions – the Russian Revolution of October 1917 brought that country out of war while the German Revolution in November 1918 brought the horror to a final close.

Initially, Connolly hoped to start such a revolution with a general strike. He wanted industries throughout the continent to be paralysed and followed by 'the erecting of socialist barricades and acts of rioting by socialist soldiers and sailors, as happened in Russia in 1905'.⁸² Workers held the key to all great changes, he argued, noting that 'a great continental

rising of the working class would stop the war; a universal protest at public meetings would not save a single life from being wantonly destroyed'.⁸³

It is a tribute to his utter commitment to revolution that he did not fall prey to demoralisation when this strike did not happen. Rather he sought another route – striking a blow in Ireland, by whatever means necessary. In doing so he linked the cause of Irish freedom to the wider international battle against imperialism. At no point, did he think in narrow nationalist terms. Rather he recognised that Ireland could play a particularly crucial role as it lay closest to the heart of greatest empire of the day. A blow struck there would be a hundred times more effective than elsewhere and would give encouragement to struggles of colonial people all over the world. Ireland was tiny country but it was also like a knife pointed at the heart of empire. In brief, Connolly hoped that a revolution in Ireland would set off a chain reaction:

Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord.⁸⁴

These then were Connolly's motives for not only joining the 1916 Rising but becoming its main instigator. He was so appalled by the horror of war and the 'carnival of reaction' that partition would bring that he was determined to strike a blow. However in the absence of a socialist party and in the context of a defeated working class, he could only do that on republican terms. He would have preferred it to be different and even after he sealed his pact with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, he still remonstrated that if labour had not been attacked by so many 'fervent advanced patriots'

it would now be in our power at a word to crumple up and demoralise every offensive of the enemy against the champions of Irish freedom. Had we been able to carry out all our plans, as such an Irish organisation of Labour alone could carry them out, we could at a word have created all the conditions necessary to the striking of a successful blow whenever the military arm of Ireland wished to move.⁸⁵

The 1916 Rising and official Ireland

The 1916 Rising is one of the most deeply disturbing events of Irish history for today's rulers. Depending on the circumstances, they either try to embrace it or virtually disown it. In 1966, in a flush of confidence after the defeat of the IRA's border campaign, they promoted militant celebrations of the Rising. A fourteen part series called *Insurrection* was screened on RTE which exonerated the revolutionary message of Pearse and Connolly. But then when the Northern Troubles broke out in 1969, they ran away in terror from subsequent celebrations.

Today after the end of the armed conflict in the North, our rulers have again embraced it and on the ninetieth anniversary the Irish Army holds a special commemoration by parading down O Connell St. It is a crude attempt by the Ahern government to take the green flag back from their republican rivals. But the new display of militarism has little connection with many of the real motives for the rising.

The Rising was in the first instance an attempted insurrection. It discarded all the norms of conventional parliamentary politics which had been well established by then and was an

attempted seizure of power. Turning such a revolutionary act into a pageant conducted by officers and generals is deeply ironical. Take, for example, the simple act of displaying the Proclamation which was posted onto the walls of the GPO. Today, the authorities of Dublin City Council have decreed that no political poster of any sort can be displayed in the city. Each morning council officials tour the city and order council workers to tear down posters. Their aim is to prevent people to assembling at meetings – not to mind seizing the GPO!

The point of the official pageant is to finally settle the argument about which army can claim the official line of descent to the Provisional Government, formed in 1916. For many decades, the Army Council of the IRA claimed the lineage – but with their recent retirement from arms, the Irish government wants to close the pass by asserting that its army is indeed, the sole, legitimate inheritor. All of this may appear obscure – but it raises an interesting point. If the present Irish Army is indeed the inheritor of the joint republican army formed by Pearse and Connolly, then what why is it partaking in the EU Battle Groups?

The 1916 rising was, if nothing else, a profound anti-imperialist revolt. It was a blow struck for Irish freedom- but, as we have seen, the context was revulsion against an imperialist war. Contrast this with current role of the Irish army. The government has ordered it to join one of the thirteen EU battle groups, which can go into theatres of operation that are 6,000 kilometres from the European continent. Their purpose was explained by Jaap de Hoop Schefer, the NATO Secretary General,

'Battle groups could be used to go to war. Why did the EU create the Battle Group? It is not just to help re-build a country. The Battle Groups are not for building schools. We shouldn't think the EU is for soft power and NATO for tough power'.⁸⁶

Such is the explicit imperialist nature of the Battle Groups, that even the Danish Government felt compelled – under popular pressure, of course- to stay out of them. But the Irish elite had no problem. They already facilitate 300,000 US troops going through Shannon each year to maintain the conquest of Iraq. Their current ambition is to hollow out Irish neutrality and help the US stitch back its old imperialist alliance with EU countries.

The explosive nature of these connections between the 1916 Rising and the current pro-imperialist policies of the Irish government was illustrated neatly by an incident in Galway. The local Fianna Fail cumman had advertised a special screening of *Mise Eire*, the passionate celebration of Ireland's revolt against Empire. The Galway Alliance Against War turned up with placards proclaiming 'Mise Eire- Mise Iraq' – which made the assembled Fianna Failers livid.

All of this illustrates how the revolutionary events of Irish history can still have a deep impact today. And our rulers know it.

For thirty years various forms of revisionism were encouraged in Irish schools and universities. Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, became the standard history of modern Ireland. Foster's main argument was that the Easter Rising was an exercise in irrationality and its legacy was the Northern Ireland crisis. He implied that constitutional nationalism, as espoused by the Irish Home Rule Party, would have achieved the same outcome without the divisions that ensued. He defined the Irish nationalist movement as

Anglo-phobic and anti-Protestant, subscribing to a theory of "the Celtic Race" that denied the "true" Irishness of Irish Protestants and Ulster Unionists, but was prepared to incorporate them into a vision of "independent Ireland" whether they wanted it or not.⁸⁷

Undoubtedly there were all sorts of sentiments in the Irish nationalist movement but what Foster missed was that it was a reaction to the oppression caused by empire. He managed to analyse the Irish famine in terms of the backwardness of Irish agricultural techniques rather than the result of the landlord system.

The history departments of the two main universities of the state, UCD and TCD, cloaked this approach in a spurious form of liberalism. The leaders of the Rising were presented as 'fanatical Catholics' and in some cases sexually oppressed. Ruth Dudley Edwards who offers a weekly diatribe in the *Sunday Independent* today wrote a biography of Pearse which essentially defined him as a repressed gay man.⁸⁸ Interestingly, this same approach is employed in descriptions of Islamic resistance movements when crude racist caricatures are used to assume they are motivated by a desire to have virgins in the after-life.

This form of liberalism is merely a code for superiority. The citizens of the Empire are rational - while their opponents are 'fanatics'. They live wholesome lives - while their anti-imperialist opponents are 'frustrated'. This liberalism which so enthusiastically interrogated the texts of anti-imperialist fighters genuflects meekly before the new Thatcherite rulers of universities. Its reeks of deference to established authorities and lacks any critical faculty to interrogate real power - of the past or the present.

The revisionists are irritating - but they are a tiny minority. They appear vocal only because they occupy university chairs and get employed as newspaper columnists. Today official Ireland is best represented by Mary McAleese's recent speech on the 1916 rising. Quite rightly she defended the rising noting 'that there is a tendency for powerful and pitiless elites to dismiss with damning labels those who oppose them' and that modern attempts to present the rising as a sectarian or exclusive exercise merely followed this pattern. But her aim was to use the Rising to exonerate the conservative culture that developed in Ireland afterwards. There was no 'narrow nationalism' but the Irish elite were inspired by the leaders of 1916 to be 'inclusive'.

The fact that a mere 50 Jewish people were allowed to enter this 'inclusive society' after the Holocaust might suggest otherwise - especially as they were only let in after it they had converted to Catholicism! The modern immigrant to Ireland who is forced to queue for many hours for totally unnecessary 're-entry visas' every time they wish to come back from holidays might also raise some questions. And that is not to mention the absurdity of the claim that the 'social agenda of the Rising' is being realised in today's Celtic Tiger.

What neither McAleese nor the revisionists can handle is the revolutionary impulse of the Rising. McAleese has no right to proclaim her state the inheritors of the revolutionaries of 1916 when it assiduously helps in the conquest of Iraq today. She might with some justification have sung a paean of praise to Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin. He never hid his aim to create a 'Gaelic Manchester' and to gain for Ireland its own share in the colonial enterprise!

Connolly, the Left and 1916

On the eve of the 1916 rising Connolly struck a note of warning for the Irish Citizen Army. 'In the event of victory, hold onto your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are for economic as well as political liberty.'⁸⁹ He certainly was not involved in a 'blood sacrifice' to help awaken the Irish nation. In fact, on a different occasion, he denounced such talk as that of a 'blithering idiot'.⁹⁰

Connolly's aim was to strike a serious blow against the empire and although the odds were against him he originally hoped for some success. There were only 6,000 combat troops in the country who were supported by 9500 members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The leaders of the rising had hoped to mobilise the bulk of the 16,000 Irish Volunteers and to have use of 20,000 rifles landed from the German ship, the Aud. The ship was, however, sighted by the British navy and had to be scuttled to prevent the capture of its arms. In addition, the conspiratorial tactics of republicans backfired when Irish Volunteer leader, Eoin McNeill, countermanded orders. Despite these setbacks the rising went ahead as, most probably, the ringleaders would have had to face the tender mercies of British justice anyway. The result, therefore was a much smaller affair than anticipated.

The reaction of the Left to the rising was divided, then as well as now. Quite naturally, the reformist left found it extremely difficult to deal with as it was an insurrection against the authority of the British parliament. George Lansbury, for example, a leading figure on the British left regarded it as a crime against the British people. After the rising, the leaders of the ITGWU held a minutes silence for both their former leader and those who died in WW1. There was no specific recognition or support granted to James Connolly.

Later this would change and the Labour Party and the union leaders would fall in behind the general commemoration of 1916. In the decades after Connolly's death, the leaders of the ITGWU grew closer to Fianna Fáil and in the 1940s even formed a National Labour party which was sympathetic to that party. Their later attempts to honour Connolly for joining 1916 had far more to do with nationalism rather than any general instinct to fight imperialism. Honouring 1916 became a way of embracing the conservative ethos of the South.

The clearest support for the 1916 rebellion came from the revolutionary left, in particular the Russian revolutionary Lenin. At the time he was engaged in a polemic with other socialists such as Radek and Trotsky who had played down the possibility or significance of anti-imperialist revolts. This resulted from a mechanical form of reasoning that did not make due allowance for specific political aspirations for national self determination. Against this Lenin argued,

To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts of small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi proletarian masses against oppression by landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc - *to imagine all this is to repudiate revolution.*

So one army lines up in one place and says 'We are for socialism' and another, somewhere else says 'we are for imperialism' and that will be a social revolution. Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a putsch.⁹¹

Lenin's support for the 1916 rebellion arose from a more general opposition to a narrow, formalistic and sectarian form of politics. The sectarian withholds support from genuine struggles unless these have first embraced the right socialist programme. While sounding tremendously left wing, this attitude, in fact, implies a form of passivity – often before a dominant imperialist ideology. Lenin's point was that unless revolutionaries sided with people who fought empire – even if they held 'prejudices and reactionary fantasies'⁹² they could never hope to shape events and create a space for a distinct socialist message. His support for the 1916 Rising was not conditional on it having a semi-left wing message – the radicalism of the Proclamation being quite limited. Rather, it was that in a country oppressed by empire people had every right to win their freedom and socialists should support them in that fight.

However, even if the revolutionary left defends the 1916 rebellion as a blow against imperialism, questions can still be raised about Connolly's specific tactics. With the great advantage of hindsight, it is clear that the way Connolly approached the rebellion made it easier to disguise his distinct socialist message. In the months running up to the rebellion his writings took on a more nationalist tone, this being the price he paid to cajole and coax the IRB leaders into the rebellion. Despite being the leader of the militant ITGWU he did not campaign among the broader membership – beyond the ICA- for support. Instead he embraced the conspiratorial tactics of the IRB of promoting insurrection by means of behind the scenes manoeuvres. More oddly, during the Rising itself he never issued a specific socialist proclamation which indicated publicly that that he wanted both 'economic as well as political liberty'.

However, there is a context to all of this. The ITGWU, the industrial union he had placed such importance on, was barely recovering from a tremendous defeat. Most of socialist movement he had spent his life in was torn apart because it would not stand up to imperialism. And the immediate future seemed to offer a long bloody war followed by a reactionary settlement of the Irish question. Given all this, the most admirable thing about James Connolly was that he decided to act.

Chapter 5: Connolly's Missing Legacy

The Celtic Tiger makes a mockery of not only Connolly's vision but also the aspiration of the 1916 Proclamation to 'cherish all the children of the nation equally'. Ireland is the second most unequal society in the industrialised world behind the US and is held up as a model by right wing thinks because of its neoliberal policies. The Heritage Foundation is a right wing US think tank that is funded by 45 large corporations such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texaco and Merrill Lynch. It benchmarks countries against each other and awarded Ireland fifth place in its 'freedom' index – significantly higher than the US itself.⁹³ Echoing these ratings, the National Competitiveness Council has produced detailed charts to show how Ireland comes near to the top of the world league for cutting business taxes and its system of light regulation.⁹⁴

Freedom for business, however, brings economic tyranny for the majority. Low taxes on wealth means there are inadequate public services and even Mary Harney has conceded that the crisis in Accident and Emergency wards is a national emergency. There are hardly any publicly funded crèches and so Irish parents pay the highest childminding charges in Europe. Freedom for speculators has also brought high rents and fantasy property prices. Meanwhile, the only group who do not exercise their economic 'freedom' are trade unionists whose wages are restrained through social partnership deals. No wonder the Celtic Tiger has brought about an enormous re-distribution of wealth – to the already wealthy.

Connolly's prediction about partition bringing a 'carnival of reaction' has also come true. For decades, the mirror image of Fianna Fail on the other side of the border was the Unionist Party. Both wrapped themselves in their different flags and then pursued the exact same class politics of shoring up wealth and privilege. In recent years, the Unionist Party has been replaced by even worse bigots in the Democratic Unionist Party who not only spot Fenian plots everywhere but act as genuine dinosaurs when they denounce gay relationships as 'immoral, offensive and obnoxious'.⁹⁵ While the Union Jack flutters ever stronger, sectarian divisions hurt workers the most. Wages in the North are the lowest in these islands, 25% below the average in the EU, a third below wages in the US and half of wages in Germany.

If ever there was a country crying out for a strong socialist movement, it is Ireland. But that only begs the question, what happened to the legacy of James Connolly?

Gone missing

James Connolly was executed on May 12th by a British firing squad that was spurred on by his Irish enemies. The employers' organisations had opposed the Easter Rising. The Cork employers' federation denounced it as 'a shameful outrage'⁹⁶ while in Galway the urban council called for the formation of 'a committee for public safety'.⁹⁷ Connolly's execution had been postponed due to a wound and at one stage there appeared to be small chance of saving his life as cries for clemency rose. However, William Martin Murphy's Irish Independent group rushed in to call for his legal murder. An editorial argued that if Connolly and Sean McDermott who are among the key ringleaders 'were treated with too great

leniency, they would take it as indication of weakness on the part of the government'.⁹⁸ Despite a difference of nationality, the Irish and British rich united in their call for the execution of this great revolutionary socialist.

Within months of the 1916 rebellion the mood in Ireland began to change. The heroism of the republican and socialist fighters, the brutal imposition of martial law and the growing opposition to war throughout the whole of Europe all contributed. The first indication of a shift came in January 1916 when Count Plunkett, the father of the executed leader Joseph Plunkett, won the North Roscommon bye-election for Sinn Fein.

At the time of the rising Sinn Fein had declined to one central branch in Dublin. It had the advantage, though, of being the only open political party that was associated with the rebellion. Although its leader Arthur Griffith had taken no part in rising, the press had labelled it a Sinn Fein rebellion. Tragically, there was no functioning socialist party to contest the same space. Within a year of the rising the number of Sinn Fein clubs had grown to 166 with a membership of 11,000 and the party held a re-organised convention where Griffith symbolically stepped aside as leader in favour of the 1916 hero, Eamon De Valera. Open discussion on what form of government an independent Ireland would have was brushed aside but in reality, Griffith's call to build up native Irish capital still shaped the party's agenda. Before long the very employers who denounced the rebellion were making their way into its ranks.

In January 1919, the War of Independence began when the first shots were fired on police in Soloheadbeg, in Co Tipperary. Contrary to nationalist imagery, the war opened up an immense social as well as political radicalisation with Irish workers reaching unprecedented heights of militancy. By 1920, 120,000 workers joined the ITGWU and many took part in a score of local general strikes that broke out across the country. Charleville, for example, had five general strikes although there was no previous history of trade unionism in the town. The ideas of the Russian revolution had also an immense impact. Before 1921, no fewer than eight 'soviets' were established in occupied workplaces. The term 'soviet' was not of course part of the common parlance but such was the impact of the Russian revolution that, when the miners in one of the remotest areas of Leitrim threw out the owners, they set up an Arigna 'soviet'. Similarly when workers took control of the city of Limerick in response to British army oppression, they also set up a 'soviet'. As Connolly had predicted, once workers mobilised they did not confine themselves to revolting against oppression of a purely British kind. The social and national demands of the people intermeshed as they sought to impose their will on society. On the land, thousands also tried to drive out the remnants of British landlordism and divide the land among them.⁹⁹

In many instances, the republican fighters attempted to quell the social revolt - setting up land courts, for example, to diffuse the peasant agitation. All of this created a space for a socialist force to intervene by both supporting the fight for independence but also pressing their own demands for a Workers Republic. The tragedy was that this did not occur. As Peadar O'Donnell remarked 'the place Connolly had purchased for the organised Labour movement in the leadership of the independence movement was denied or reneged'.¹⁰⁰ How this occurred is a remarkable story in itself.

In the immediate aftermath of the rising, labour leaders such as Tom Johnson virtually disowned Connolly and described the Irish Citizen's Army as mere tenants in Liberty Hall

without any connection to the ITGWU.¹⁰¹ However, as the mood changed, the labour leaders used Connolly's participation in the 1916 rebellion to subordinate the socialist movement to the republicans. Effectively, they accepted De Valera's argument that 'Labour Must Wait' until after independence had been achieved. They withdrew from the general election of 1918, claiming that the workers of Ireland 'should willingly sacrifice for a brief period their aspiration towards political power, if thereby the future of the nation can be enhanced'. They even added proudly that the Labour Party was 'the only party which is prepared to sacrifice party in the interest of nation'.¹⁰²

In practice, the labour leaders acted as advisors to the republican forces, or in Peadar O'Donnell words, they took up a position on the 'prompter's stool'.¹⁰³ They tried to paint republicanism in a gloss of red, hoping to stake out a position for the unions in an independent Ireland. To some extent, this strategy arose from failure to understand that socialists could *both* work in united front against British empire and still challenge republican hegemony by relating to the social radicalism. Like Sean O'Casey, Tom Johnson and William O'Brien saw the fight against empire as a distraction from 'real economic' struggles. Bizarrely, the Socialist Party of Ireland, the small party formed by supporters of Connolly, claimed that 'the preoccupation of the people with the struggle against British imperialism has been an obstacle in preventing the spread of revolutionary socialism'.¹⁰⁴

The strategy of coat-tailing the republicans proved disastrous because it encouraged moderation and ceded even further political ground. Instead of fully backing the Limerick workers, Tom Johnson advised them to evacuate their town. In May 1920, when railway workers refused to transport armed British soldiers, the ITUC failed to escalate the action. Later after the Treaty was signed, Johnson distanced himself from the soviets that had sprung up in Munster, claiming they were 'unofficial and unconnected to any general policy of the unions'.¹⁰⁵ The more they distanced themselves from militancy, the more the union leaders drew closer to the conservative wing of Sinn Fein. They flattered themselves thinking that by acting as advisors rather than developing an independent political position, they were making gains. After the labour leaders joined a Dail committee to advise on future labour policy, an ITWGU leader, Thomas Foran, wrote to Larkin that, 'Griffith has had to move with the times. The movement is more advanced than you seem to think, and every day becomes more infected with Bolshevik propaganda'.¹⁰⁶ It was, of course, a fantasy. The newly independent Ireland was being built around Griffith's blatantly pro-capitalist policies.

Connolly's legacy was simply sold off as the Red flag was lowered below the Green of Irish republicanism. As always, that tradition could rhetorically swing left but rhetoric and deeds are two different things. Some of the radical aspirations found their way into the Democratic Programme of the First Dail, written by the Labour leader, Tom Johnson. But at the heart for republicanism was the politics of class alliances which repeatedly told labour that they had to wait until after independence had been won. The radicalism and heroism of workers was used to bring about an independent Ireland where capital and not labour prospered. This particular experience is, of course, relevant today.

Recovering the Connolly legacy

Twenty first century Ireland is a very different place to the conservative church dominated country of the past. The main party of Irish right wing politics, Fianna Fail, has entered a

long period of decline. Its image as the party of the 'plain people' has been shattered by a decade of corruption scandals while its principal ally, the Catholic Church, is still reeling from revelations of child abuse. A new generation has arisen which is tuned into the wide and vast anti-capitalist literature. When Noam Chomsky spoke in Dublin, for example, over 5,000 people turned up to his various meetings. Beyond these politicised layers, a huge protest movement has emerged at local level which is putting 'people power' to the top of its agenda. In a word: there is room for a new politics.

Connolly's vision of revolutionary socialism has much to offer. His name was never associated with the tyrannical state capitalist regimes of Eastern Europe and the socialism he espoused was based on a thorough going democracy. The return to the Bush's Age of Empire has made the links he forged between socialism and anti-imperialism more relevant than ever. His vision of a fighting union movement offers an alternative to the decline the unions have experienced since entering social partnership.

This vision is at odds with the Labour Party, which still claims some ambiguous allegiance to Connolly. The party has already entered an alliance with Fine Gael, despite the latter's neo-liberal politics. In deference to Fine Gael, Labour has pledged not to raise taxes on corporations and during major struggles such as over the Rosport 5 it merely called for mediation rather than giving full support. Like Fine Gael it has focused on 'law and order' but oddly has ignored the crimes its allies committed when they took corrupt donations from businessmen. Its record on opposing imperialism is dreadful as was demonstrated when the party spokesperson joined in the attacks on the Colombia Three rather than on the US embassy which has given covert support to death squads. If Labour ever make into government with Fine Gael, there is absolutely no grounds for assuming that that Pat Rabbitte will behave any different to Tony Blair.

This leaves Sinn Féin as the major party claiming an allegiance to Connolly. It has recently re-issued his pamphlet *Socialism Made Easy* to enhance its radical image among Southern workers. But Irish history demonstrates that republican radicalism is often skin deep and certainly Connolly's Marxism sits uneasily with Gerry Adams attempt to court corporate America. The party has received a substantial donation, for example, from Coca Cola¹⁰⁷ and its members have argued against boycotts of Coca Cola inside the union movement. Its leadership are determined to enter a future coalition government with Fianna Fáil and so the radical rhetoric of today is more a mechanism to build up a base in order to be in a better bargaining position in the future. Republicanism has often made some quick shifts from armed struggle to conventional politics. In the late 1920s, for example, Fianna Fáil employed a rhetoric that was *more* radical than the present day Sinn Féin's, calling for the abolition the banks and their replacement with credit unions; the abolition of the standing army and creation of an alternative citizens' militia; and, of course, adherence to the ideas of James Connolly.¹⁰⁸ Yet by 1932, Fianna Fáil had become the main party of Ireland's capitalist class. To paraphrase Marx: if history repeats itself, first it's a tragedy - the second time it can only be described as a farce.

Modern 21st century Ireland needs a radical alternative to both Labour and Sinn Féin - an alternative that will not enter coalition in order manage capitalism but one that relies on people power to extract the maximum concessions from it. Such an alternative is more likely, in the short term at least, to be built as an alliance between people who oppose neo-

liberalism from different traditions. This type of alliance would enable different groupings to emphasise what they have in common while also allowing a degree of freedom to promote diverse views. Undoubtedly, some may aim for radical structural reform of the system itself - while others will adopt a revolutionary stance. Nevertheless the alliance itself can create a space for further political development. The re-constitution of working class politics through new alliances or parties is one of the main features of the current international situation. It arises because of the decline of the old Stalinist parties who were associated with the USSR and the embrace of 'social liberalism' or 'third way' politics by Labour Parties. There is clearly a space for such politics in Ireland as the support for People before Profit demonstrates.

However, within such alliances it is vital that a distinctly revolutionary current exists. The pressure within capitalist society to compromise and enter a conventional political road is enormous. To take one just one example: In Italy, the Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) won huge support after it embraced the social movements and supported anti-capitalist protestors during the police riot in Genoa in 2002. Thousands joined the party and pushed it even further to the left but as stakes escalated, the party leadership did an about turn. Arguing for a more pacifist stance and claiming that the era of insurrection was over, they decided to enter an electoral pact led by the former EU Commissioner Romano Prodi. Prodi's record in promoting neo-liberalism is not in doubt - but the PRC's ability to talk anti-capitalism while working with Prodi is. It is vital, therefore, that a strong revolutionary current exists to challenge these compromises.

We are at a different stage of the struggle in Ireland but it is also evident that major opportunities are opening for the left. Opportunities have the unfortunate habit of not hanging around forever - they need to be grasped. At the moment the trajectory of Irish society is to the left - as even Bertie Ahern acknowledged when he bizarrely claimed to be a socialist. But that could also change.

The right wing forces are already re-organising around a new Ireland where capitalism co-operates across the border. The republicans believe that they can speed up that process and remove the border by 2016, the hundredth anniversary of the Rising. They hope to do so by getting inside the establishment on both sides of the border, which even if they were successful could only bring territorial unity while leaving intact the old sectarian structures.

James Connolly, however, was inspired by a different vision - that all great changes came from the bottom up and were forged on the anvil of workers struggle and people power. It was simply axiomatic that you could not talk anti-capitalism while sharing bed space with the lords of capital. The strong, utterly revolutionary vision is more relevant to 21st century Ireland than it was even in his own day. But this time it needs a solid and large organisation to be built to promote it.

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DO YOU THINK THAT:

Ireland is governed by politicians who answer only to a wealthy elite

Despite the boom, there is little money for public services. Our hospitals are in a chaotic condition; there are hardly any publicly run crèches – but we increasingly pay a host of new stealth taxes.

The reason: Ireland has become a tax haven for the big corporations.

Ireland should not be supporting Bush's war on Iraq

About one quarter of a million US troops travel through Shannon each year on their way to fight in Iraq. Shannon airport has also been used to transport prisoners to secret CIA torture centres.

But the majority of the Irish people oppose this war and want to remain neutral.

Migrants are being mistreated by Irish employers

Irish Ferries and Gama have exposed gross exploitation. Employers use the fact that migrants need a work permit to keep them under their thumbs. They want to replace permanent workers with agency or 'contingent' workers.

Socialists seek to unite workers to challenge employers – and not let them divide us.

Catholic and Protestant workers have more in common than divides them

James Connolly wanted a 32

county Workers Republic – where all workers gained. Not a country where the Catholic Church ran the schools and hospitals (or where sectarian bigots wanted to make Catholics into second class citizens). You will never get that by going into Coalition with Fianna Fail – or Ian Paisley! The Socialist Workers Party is the leading anti-establishment party in this country.

We advocate 'people power' as the main way to bring about change. Instead of just electing another politician, we can bring change from below.

The best way to do that is to unite people from many different backgrounds into a common struggle.

The SWP is keen to play its part in a coming together of a New Left to fight the establishment parties and their neo-liberal agenda. Within all these movements, the SWP keeps to the fore the goal of fundamental change – a revolution which brings about an end to war, racism and privilege.

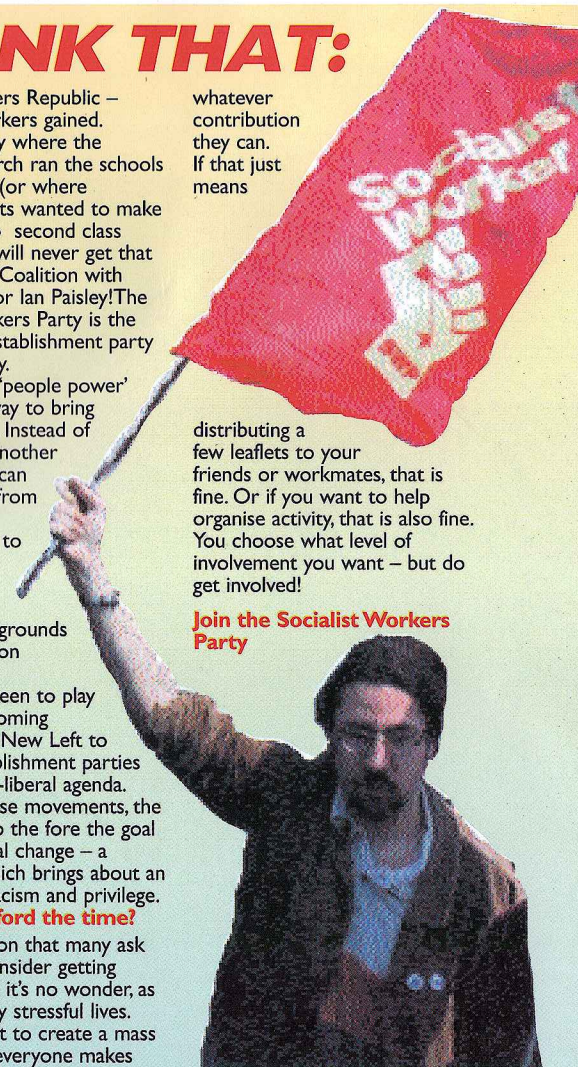
But can I afford the time?

It's the question that many ask when they consider getting involved. And it's no wonder, as we face hugely stressful lives. Socialists want to create a mass party where everyone makes

whatever contribution they can. If that just means

distributing a few leaflets to your friends or workmates, that is fine. Or if you want to help organise activity, that is also fine. You choose what level of involvement you want – but do get involved!

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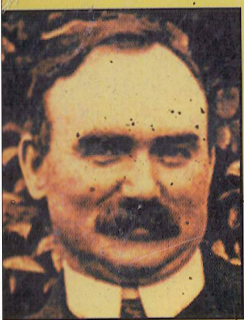
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